Nation

Volume 20, No. 10 • March 22, 2013

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Patrick Brazeau: The journey continues

by Will Nicholls

Since the collapse of the pedestal Patrick Brazeau called home, little has been heard beyond the initial reactions. Perhaps the changing of the guard in Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (AANDC), which saw John Duncan replaced with Bernard Valcourt as minister, had some positive results for Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Certainly it bought this government some time to get certain problem areas out of the media spotlight. There was the hunger strike, the media coverage of the Idle No More movement, the murdered and missing women issue, Patrick Brazeau, Senate reform and a host of other negative stories dominating the media.

The desire to put these concerns on the back shelf has led First Nations to believe the Harper administration doesn't take their concerns seriously and hopes they will simply go away. Many point to Brazeau's appointment as a senator as an example of this. Harper's Aboriginal golden boy was a concern from the start as the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP) had no real credibility. They claimed to represent off-reserve Aboriginals, yet their leaders were "elected" by only a few people and mostly bureaucrats at that. But they said what the government wanted and received greater funding while organizations such as the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) saw their finances being cut. Brazeau was front and centre stage as Harper's sycophant.

Touted as an Aboriginal expert, Brazeau could safely criticize any Aboriginal person or organization, something that was more difficult for his non-Native higher-ups.

Any concerns over financial mismanagement, both personal and professional, were ignored and the same went for the allegations of sexual harassment. These red lights included Brazeau's salary being garnished by Revenue Quebec for falling behind in child-support payments and other financial irregularities.

For example, Patrick Brazeau used his former father-in-law's address in a First Nations community to claim an Aboriginal income tax exemption from 2004 to 2008. He was head of CAP at that time and this confused a few people, including Kitigan Zibi Chief Gilbert Whiteduck, who said, "I'm not sure how he would have done that. Normally you have income tax exemption when you live on a reserve and you are employed by a reserve."

Remember, this is the behaviour of the senator who loudly proclaimed, "I have been a strong proponent of accountability and sometimes of the lack of accountability."

While it's all quiet on the western front, it might be time for the government to ensure it remains so. If Brazeau can extend the time he is in court and delays his final sentencing past December 2015 before he resigns from the Senate, he will get a pension for life. This will create an uproar.

It might just be easier to look at his tax evasion practice, however. The $21,000 per year housing allowance he falsely claimed works out to over $80,000 since he was appointed to the Senate. Add in the non-payment of income tax from the past with fines and Brazeau may have to claim bankruptcy, which, according to Senate rules, would lead to his expulsion from the Red Chamber. It could be a quiet way out for a government that likes the silence of the land.

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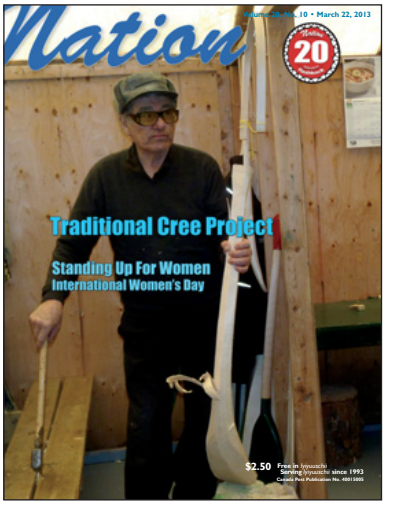

Elder Alfred Coon Come

Respect and recognition

by Will Nicholls

It is that time of year when Quebec's community newspapers look back and take stock of their efforts. Here in Quebec we send the stories to the Quebec Community Newspapers Association and they send them to judges from outside the province.

As editor-in-chief I am proud of the 12 nominations and one honourable mention we have received for 2012. We are guaranteed first, second or third place and this shows the calibre and professionalism of the people working here at *the Nation*.

Even though writers, columnists, and reporters get a lot of the credit for the stories, it is a team effort that makes it possible. Thanks to all *the Nation* staff whose teamwork created tangible results.

In two categories we have two of the three nominations and this is something to be proud of. At the end of the day it is the people of Eeyou Istchee and their stories that make all this possible. It shows what a dynamic nation and people we are.

***The Nation* is nominated for:**
Best Special Section: *The Nation*
Best Feature Story: Amy German
Best Business Story: Jesse Staniforth
Honourable Mention (business story): Mark Della Posta
Best Arts and Entertainment Story: Martin Siberok
Best Column Writing: Xavier Kataquapit, Lyle Stewart
Best Editorial (local affairs): Daniel David, Will Nicholls
Bob Phillips Award for the Best Editorial (general): Will Nicholls
Best Education Story: Jesse Staniforth
Best News Photo: Lyle Stewart
Best Feature Photo: Will Nicholls

letters

Here is a suggestion, write articles with sensible perspectives on stories surrounding the eye of the storm. I for one, Mistissiniinuu, appreciate reading articles with sensible angles.

Allen Matoush
Strateco Community Relations Manager - Mistissini

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A new voice for the missing and murdered

A new Parliamentary committee will be formed, but who will it help?

by Amy German

A motion put forward on Valentine's Day by Liberal MP Carolyn Bennett will finally see a new Parliamentary committee study the alarming number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada. The motion passed unanimously on February 27.

Bennett, who is the Liberal critic for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, proposed the motion on a day when hundreds of Aboriginal women and their supporters had rallied on Parliament Hill demanding action for the over 600 victims who have not seen justice.

Thousands of protestors across Canada attended similar rallies in solidarity with those in Ottawa.

Bennett said that while she was excited to see the motion pass, it wasn't surprising as it was put forward one day after Human Rights Watch released its report accusing the RCMP of raping Aboriginal women in northern BC.

"The Conservatives ended up having to do something," said Bennett. "I hope we can carry out this with respect and in a genuine way that is non-partisan as possible without the usual defensiveness that everything is perfect in the government of Canada or in policing.

"It is clear that a lot of the people who are very close to this issue want an examination of policing. There are too many stories that if a white woman goes missing you have 200 people combing a field, but if an Aboriginal woman is missing people go, well, it was bound to happen or something along those lines because of the vulnerable nature of their lifestyle."

According to Bennett, a special Parliamentary committee is the best way for the government to address this issue until the opposition has another opportunity to "get rid of this government in 2015."

If power changes hands, Bennett wants a national inquiry to be set up – something she's also been demanding.

"I don't think Canadians realize that murders are solved in this country at 84%. But if the victim is a missing or murdered Aboriginal woman or girl the murder clearance rate drops to 50%," explained Bennett.

"Whether it is the Pickton investigation or the Highway of Tears or what might be a serial killer in Winnipeg, it is clear that this requires a pan-Canadian examination and I hope that we will be able to come up with some recommendations that can actually put us on a better path."

For Bridget Tolley, founder of Families of Sisters in Spirit, a group that advocates for the rights of families of murdered and missing Aboriginal women, the time to study these issues has passed.

Carolyn Bennett

"This is a very good thing for some people to hear. But since 2004, when Amnesty International came out with the Stolen Sisters Report, there have been so many recommendations from organizations, grassroots groups and everybody else (concerned) who can make a recommendation.

"I just don't know what is happening with all of these reports. Why don't they just go back and look at all of the recommendations that have been made, because nothing has ever been done with them. They keep asking us 'what do you recommend' and we can make some more recommendations but nobody is listening to them," said Tolley.

According to Bennett, the special committee will have a year to produce results and will be comprised of members of all three official Parliamentary parties.

Bridget Tolley

"WHY DON'T THEY JUST GO BACK AND LOOK AT ALL OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS THAT HAVE BEEN MADE, BECAUSE NOTHING HAS EVER BEEN DONE WITH THEM."

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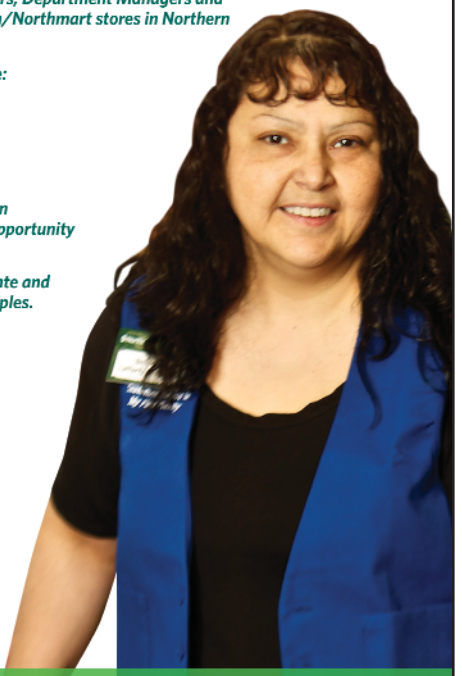

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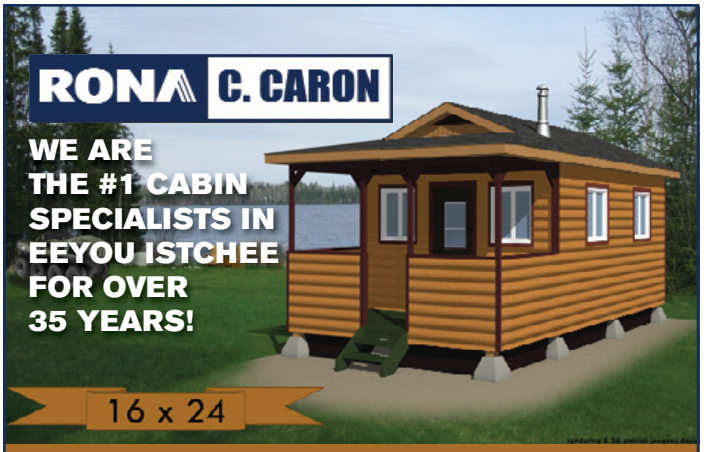

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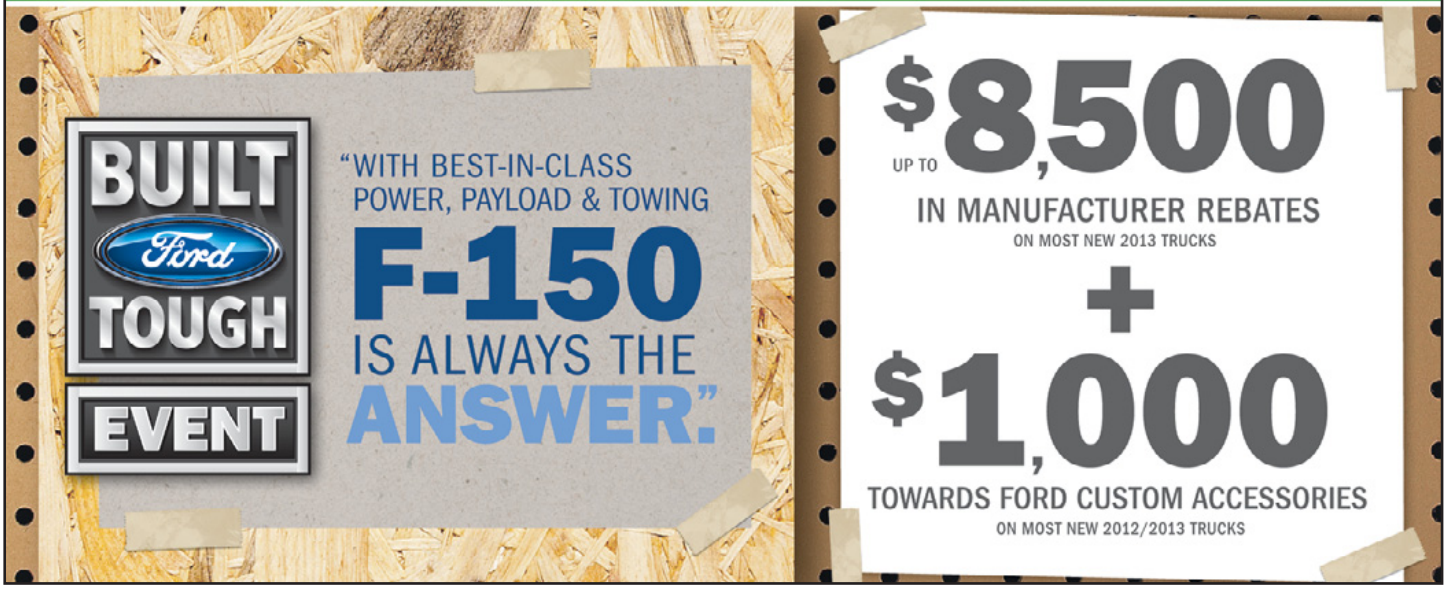


Marching for unity

The Nishiyuu walkers are an inspiration to all Aboriginals

by Akiva Levitas

With spring just around the corner, the end is almost in sight for the Nishiyuu walkers. Although the mainstream media has left much to be desired in their coverage of this journey, the walkers have inspired thousands across Canada and around the world with their quest.

Since leaving Whapmagoostui on January 16, the walkers have braved harsh winter conditions and have been dealing with pouring rain since early March. In the past two months, they have walked through five Cree Nation communities and their numbers have grown with walkers from all nine Cree communities joining the epic trek.

The emotions were high as the walkers made their way into Chisasibi, Wemindji, Eastmain and Waskaganish. At every step of their journey, support from the communities they have visited has been overwhelming with food, supplies and shelter being graciously provided. The dedication of the ground crew has been tremendous throughout the journey to ensure that all the walkers are well cared for.

Until March 21 they will be marching through Algonquin territory where they have been warmly received. They have had stops in the communities of Lac Simon, Kwekogoni, Kitiksakik, Rapid Lake, Maigan-Agik, Maniwaki and Kitigan Zibi as well as at many smaller campsites along the way. Many Algonquin youth have joined in, swelling the number of walkers to over 100.

The growing group with the original seven

The purpose of the journey is to unite Aboriginals to support the goals of the Idle No More movement as they retrace the traditional trade routes between the Cree, Algonquin and Mohawk First Nations as well as other nearby First Nations. As they pass through Algonquin territory, the walkers have had the chance to share their experiences with Algonquin youth.

Five days were planned as rest days during their stops in Kitiksakik, Dens, Rapid Lake and Sugar Bush, where they shared traditions and stories. During their time in Rapid Lake on March 13 and 14, the local clinic was made available to ensure that all of the walkers were in good condition.

Since starting their journey, the movement has grown both online and on foot. The marchers' quest is being constantly updated on their Facebook page, The Journey of Nishiyuu, with over 30,000 people following the walkers and leaving posts of encouragement. The walkers' inspiring message is being held up as a point of pride for Aboriginal communities across Canada.

Their arrival in Ottawa is expected on March 25. When they arrive on Parliament Hill, Algonquin leaders will greet them for a welcoming ceremony following which the youth will relay the message that inspired them to embark on the journey. Also greeting the walkers will be Attawapiskat First Nation Chief Theresa Spence whose fast has led to greater awareness of many issues facing the Aboriginal communities.

Eager to take part in the unfolding historical event, schoolchildren from Pikwakanagan, Akwesasne, Kitigan Zibi and Ottawa will join the walkers for the final stretch as they enter the nation's capital.

Maintaining supplies for the walkers as well as the logistics behind the endeavour is an entire quest on its own and it presents an opportunity for those wishing to contribute but are unable to join in the journey. Many communities across the country have been hosting local events in order to raise money. Those wishing to donate, can do so at nishiyuujourney.ca.

For those planning on arriving in Ottawa before March 25, there will be numerous events in and around the city in support of the walkers. One event not to miss is a benefit concert that will be held three days before their arrival at the University of Ottawa featuring traditional dancers, musicians and singers in order to raise money for the welcoming ceremony.

In their quest for unity, the walkers have struck a chord amongst people around the world with their touching journey. Before they arrive, the young walkers have already accomplished more than they ever could have imagined. The Idle No More movement will be getting a much-needed boost as the walkers build momentum and generate public interest. The journey hasn't even reached its end, but it has already made its mark on the history of the First Nations of Canada. Their story will be told by the James Bay Cree for generations to come.

Télé-Québec airs Objectif Nord

Télé-Québec aired the last part of a four-part documentary series about northern Quebec on March 11. This final episode, titled *The Future of the North*, concluded one part of Télé-Québec's massive multimedia undertaking called *Objectif Nord*.

Objectif Nord seeks to inform Quebecers about the North with a documentary series, website and book.

The documentary series was produced by Robert Cornellier. Episodes focused on a different aspect of the North through the eyes of the people who live there. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents of northern Quebec are interviewed and give their perspectives on living in the North and increasing northern development. The entirety of the documentary is now available online.

The television series is supplemented by a website with an interactive map of the North and informative games for students. The map contains historical, geographic and cultural landmarks. Many of the locations featured in the documentary – like Schefferville and Kawawachikamach – are on the map.

The final component of *Objectif Nord* is the book *Quebec Beyond the 49th*. This joint venture by anthropologist Serge Bouchard and photographer Jean Désy features both photography of northern landmarks and contributions from residents of north Quebec who give their personal histories and discuss how the North impacts their lives.

To access many of these features: http://objectifnord.telequebec.tv

photo by Andy Klink

Deputy Chief Ashley Iseroff with other representatives honour three Cree hockey players: Silas Neeposh from Mistissini, Brett Hester of Waskaganish and Waswanipi's Deverick Ottereyes.

Murder-suicide in Kuujjuaq

The community of Kuujjuaq was in mourning after Kativik Regional Police Force Constable Steve Dery, 27, died from gunshot wounds and another officer was injured while responding to a domestic dispute on March 2. His funeral took place March 9 at the Notre-Dame Basilica in Ottawa attended by colleagues, family and friends.

The two officers arrived on the scene after receiving a 911 call at 9:30 pm and were fired upon by someone inside the home. Dery was taken to the Tulattavik Hospital where he succumbed to his wounds. The other officer is in stable condition with non-life-threatening injuries.

After the shooting, reinforcements arrived and surrounded the home creating a standoff with the gunman who was trapped inside. A woman managed to escape the premises during the standoff, which ended 17 hours later when the gunman took his own life.

Hailing from Ottawa, Dery was well-liked by community residents with many describing him as a kind and generous man. On March 7, NDP MP Romeo Saganash stood in Parliament and spoke of the death of Dery.

"In the North, we depend on our police to keep our communities safe and they do this working in small numbers in a difficult environment. Despite these difficulties, members of the police, such as the Kativik Regional Police Force, go well beyond the call of duty to ensure the well-being of our communities," Saganash said.

Violence has been increasing in Kuujjuaq with a high number of assaults being recorded in 2012. Over two-thirds of those were directly related to alcohol, according to the Kativik Regional Police Force.

Although guns are common in the community where many take part in traditional activities, such as hunting and trapping, shootings are rare.

Recommendations for Ontario jury rolls

Inquiries into the deaths of remote First Nations students Reggie Bushie, Jethro Anderson, Curran Strang, Paul Panacheese, Robyn Harper, Reggie Bushie, Kyle Morriseau and Jordan Wabasse may finally see the light of day as former Supreme Court justice Frank Iacobucci delivered his report and recommendations regarding the exclusion of First Nations in the jury rolls process in the Kenora, Ontario, region.

Since 2000, seven of the eight teens died mysteriously while away at school in Thunder Bay and yet not one inquiry was carried out into their deaths.

All inquests and court trials that require juries are on hold and have been since March 10, 2011, until the issue regarding the inclusion of First Nations people on juries in the region is resolved.

"As a result of our face-to-face meetings with leaders and community members from 32 First Nations across Ontario, we developed 17 recommendations that will help ensure that the cultural values, laws and ideologies of First Nations are better reflected in the Canadian justice system," said Iacobucci.

"Implementing the recommendations to improve Ontario's juries and justice system will make great strides in improving the access and participation of First Nation peoples in Ontario's justice system."

The province and regional authorities have announced that they will be forming a committee to implement Iacobucci's recommendations.

Mistissini celebrates Women's Day

The Mistissini branch of the Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association devoted six days to the women of their community by holding a special women's conference from March 4-8, followed by a day of outdoor activities at the local children's camp.

The "Live, Love & Laugh Conference" featured a number of workshops by local women, for local women, focusing on everything from healthy relationships to healthy living.

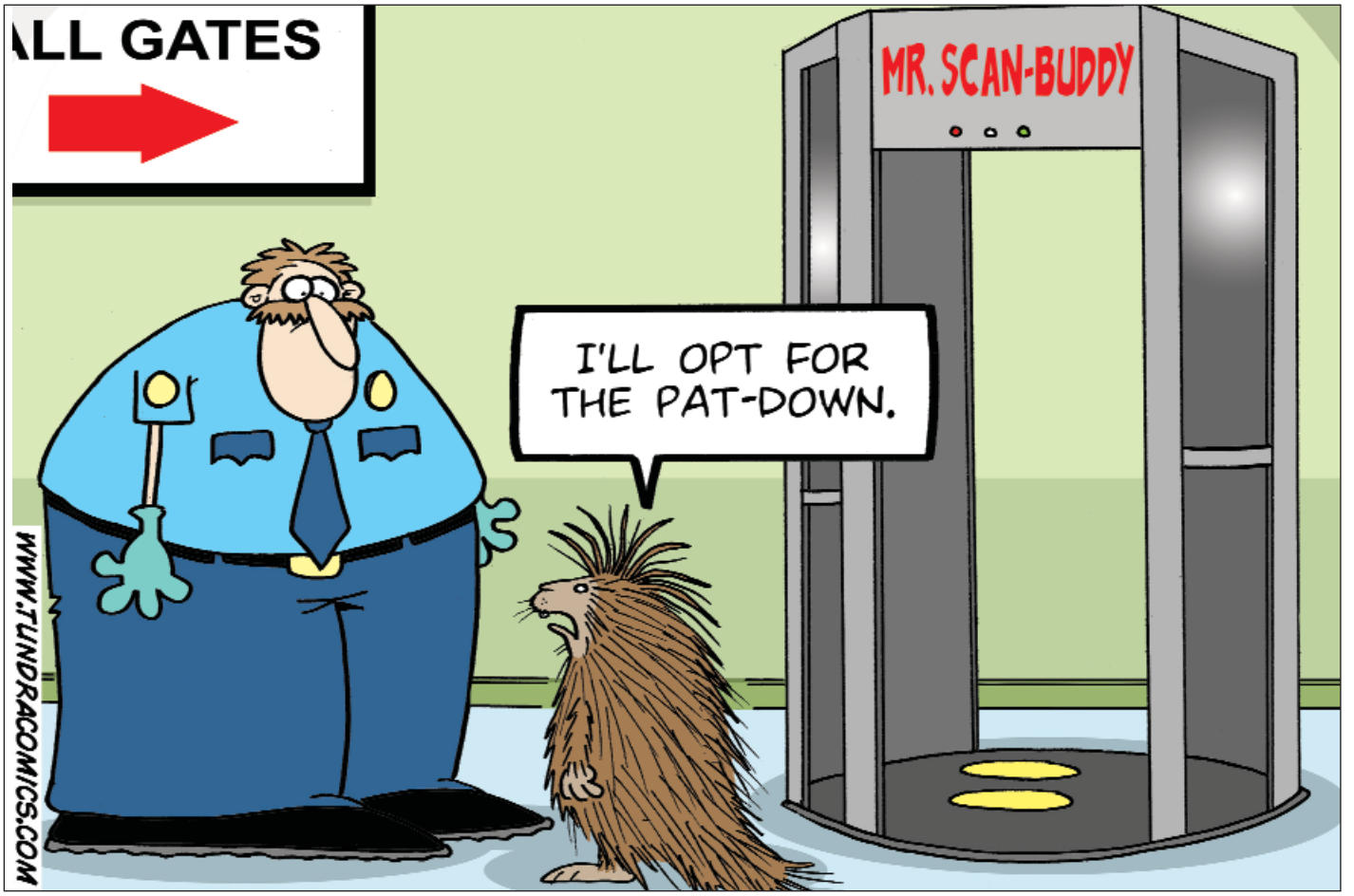
"This conference is about gathering women from our community to talk about the issues that affect women. Our objectives are to not only empower women but also let them know that they are not alone as many of them will often think that it is 'only me' who is going through something like a partner cheating, addiction or a suicide," said local association president Christine Petawabano.

Participants also indulged in massage services and spa services courtesy of Association, something Petawabano said that some community members had never experienced due to access or financial constraints.

"They were booked from 9:00 am right up until 8:00 pm," said Petawabano.

This year is the second year that Mistissini hosted the event.

Comic strip courtesy of Tundra Comics: www.tundracomics.com



feature

Traditional Cree Fishing and Chisheinuu Chiskutamaachewin Project

by Andi Christine Bednarzig

Students of the cabinet-making program offered by Sabtuan Adult Education Services took a morning off their woodworking projects on February 7 to visit the Traditional Cree Fishing and Chisheinuu Chiskutamaachewin Project with their teacher, Andy Anderson.

The project comprises a series of teaching lodges arranged in a semi-circle on the bank of Lake Mistassini, just after the fork on Route 167, which leads to the town of Mistissini. It is a place to regain the Cree way of life through cultural knowledge and skills as passed down from Elders of the community to their youth.

"The primary purpose of the trip," Anderson explained, "is for my students to gain an understanding and appreciation of traditional methods of wood carving, tool making and other crafts."

The secondary purpose: A hearty home-cooked lunch would be served in the dining lodge.

While some lodges are solid wood structures with wood flooring, others have wood siding that reaches only to about waist level. A tent stretches from the siding to form a roof, often with skylights. Each structure has at least one wood stove, keeping the inside toasty and cheerfully warm.

The class first visited the carving lodge. Inside, Henry Ottereyes was shaping snowshoes. He showed how the wood needed to be steamed to render it more pliable. He indicated a large contraption, which generates steam for this purpose. After

Sitting: Elder Alfred Coon Come, Harry Meskino – Carving trainer, Standing Left to Right: Tyrone Dash, Leslie Longchap, Nathan Brien, William Swallow, Andy Anderson, Henry Ottereyes – Carving trainer, Robie Nicholls, Stephane Fortin, Robie Matoush, David Mianscum, Benoit Longchap

being shaped, the snowshoe would stay in a mould for several days.

Standing next to Ottereyes, Alfred Coon Come carved shovels. He demonstrated various sizes, which could be used from stirring stew to scooping ice out of fishing holes.

Ben Gunner pulled items out of a box to show the class: a caribou hide rattle, a toy toboggan, and trimmings for drum making. He reached for a tiny replicated wooden axe.

"This is for the walking out ceremony," Gunner said. "When a young child reaches around the age of two, after they start walking, they are given this. It is a very important occasion."

Gunner then held up handcrafted skewers. "This is for cooking beaver." He demonstrated how beaver would be roasted over a fire, and twirled for uniform cooking.

"I love beaver," he added. "We are having it here next week, but I like it cooked inside out so the fat runs off."

Harry Meskino further demonstrated traditional carving and shaping techniques.

"Birch is usually the wood of choice," he said. "It is easier to bend."

At the medicine lodge, Bella Petawabano and Pat Blacksmith explained traditional medicine made from the bark of grey alder, birch and tamarack, and also from leaves. These medicines are prepared to help cure and relieve symptoms of diabetes, sore throats, croup, rashes, sores and stomach disorders. The students had questions for various ailments for themselves and family members.

Labrador tea was offered to visitors. The slender, inch-long leaves have medicinal qualities, as well as an energizing effect, providing strength and endurance. The pale brown liquid was

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smooth and woodsy, with a slightly bitter aftertaste.

Blacksmith stressed that this knowledge of medicine could only be passed on to members of the Cree community.

A heavy cloth marks the entrance to the sewing lodge. By lifting the embroidered cloth, entry is gained into a "cold room." This room acts as a buffer from the frigid air, before entering the main lodge. The flooring here is remarkably soft and buoyant, as carpets are stretched over a thick layer of evergreen boughs.

At a long table, Elders and young women were working on various sewing projects.

Elizabeth Coon Come showed her star-shaped, brilliant-blue beadwork, stitched on a piece of hide. She explained the significance of colours and how they were indicators of family groupings.

Ella Voyageur pulled out a basket of items in various stages of completion, including an intricate beaded, embroidered bag used to carry bullets, a large pouch for transporting bedding and many baby items. She demonstrated how a baby would be wrapped up and protected in layers of blankets. In past times, moss was used as diapers. "It is not any moss," she said, "but a brown moss. It is dried all summer and sticks are shifted out to make sure it is soft."

At the fishing lodge, Emily Swallow was weaving a fish net, working a hand-carved wooden shuttle between the nylon threads. It would take about a month to complete.

"These nets are for normal fish," she said and gestured towards Emma Longchap. "She is weaving a stronger net for sturgeon."

At noon, Anderson and his students headed towards the dining lodge.

Winnie Coon Come, head chef, explained that food is prepared at the lodge and fresh game is donated by local hunters.

For lunch that day, Coon Come was helped by Sophie Coon Come, Lizzie Swallow, Mary Jane Trapper, Jane Juliet Coonishish and Carla Edwards.

The central table was heaped with food. First in line was a steaming pot of soup/stew made with bacon and an unspecified meat, wafting a gentle cinnamon-like scent. Laid out next were a pan of mashed potatoes and carrots, a sheet of shepherd's pie, well-done moose steaks, fry bread, bannock plain and with raisins, and blueberry preserves.

Before lining up for lunch, Johnny Meskino led in a prayer of thanks in Cree.

After lunch, the students observed traditional hide preparation. A pale beige moose hide was stretched taut across a wooden rack. Fat and meat were shaved off, like curls of frozen butter, with a long wood-handled metal tool. When Alice Blacksmith was asked if she ever accidentally made holes in this painstaking process, she replied, "Yes, sometimes when I get tired."

It was an enlightening morning, but it was time for the students to return to the whirring and buzzing of their woodworking shop. Maybe, as they are operating power drills, planers, lathes and routers that have made working with wood less time consuming, they might stop for a moment and ponder the dedication and skills of their ancestors.

Andi Christine Bednarzig writes the Northern Lights: Living in a Cree Community blog – www.taigaspruce.wordpress.com

Discovering Tursujuq's beauty

A new collaborative park project for the north

by Amy German

Covering an incredible 26,910 square kilometres of pristine land untouched by development, the new Tursujuq National Park project, on the eastern coast of Hudson Bay, highlights the transition between the boreal forest and tundra.

Located near the Inuit community of Umiujaq, this new park project was given a green light last December and is a collaborative effort of the Inuit of Nunavik, the Crees of Eeyou Istchee and the province of Quebec.

Featuring incredible natural treasures as playful seals and beluga whales in the summertime, breathtaking landscapes, basins uniquely sculpted by meteoric impact and vestiges from over 3000 years of human

photo by Robert Fréchette

activity, this land tells its own story of evolution and survival.

"Tursujuq Park is a place where natural resources are conserved, where cultural values are celebrated, and where visitors from within Nunavik and beyond can understand, appreciate and enjoy the heritage that the park protects and presents. The park showcases Inuit history, traditions and present-day uses," explained Charlie Makiuk of Nunavik Parks Canada.

"It is a source of identity and pride to the local people. It provides a source of employment to the local community and brings in income by attracting visitors. The park plays a bigger role still in helping Quebec meet its planning and political objectives for its parks and protected-areas program," added Makiuk.

The Nation checked in with Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come to find out the role the Grand Council of the Crees played in this project.

photo by Mélanie Chabot

The Nation: *What was the Cree involvement in this project and how has the GCC contributed to this process?*

Grand Chief Coon Come: The Crees have been involved for over a decade to see this park become a reality. In the beginning, the government put aside over 10,000 km2 of this area

photo by Robert Fréchette

for a future park in the early 1990s but they knew they would need full participation of the inhabitants of that area – the Crees of Whapmagoostui and the Inuit of Kuujjuaraapik and Umiujaq. In 1994, the Hunting Fishing Trapping Coordinating Committee, which consist of Cree, Inuit, Naskapi, Canada and Quebec members, passed a resolution for the creation of this park, but it must ensure that the harvesting rights within section 24 of the JBNQA were to be respected.

A working group involving the Inuit and Cree along with the Quebec government developed the provisional master plan in 2008. This master plan is standard for all park proposals. Not only does it speak of the natural beauty of the area, but it demonstrates that this park can conserve the environment and wildlife and create and economy by means of tourism. This balance is essential and will be properly designed in the park's management plan.

Prior and even after the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) procedure, from around 2006 to 2009, the Crees of Whapmagoostui were involved in many public consultations and studies. And it was during these consultations that many people, including the Cree, stressed to the Quebec government that the park needed to include the Nastapoka watershed, which is located north of the original proposal. This was not taken into consideration and therefore, the provincial administrator approved the project with its original boundary of 15,549 km2.

The Kativik Regional Government (KRG) worked arduously to remove the Nastapoka River from Hydro-Québec's plans and to convince the Quebec government to include this area in the park boundaries. The KRG sought the help from environmental groups and the Crees. Last summer, the Grand Council received a request by the KRG to support the expansion, the Grand Council answered back positively. With the persistence of the Inuit, Crees, environmental groups and the public, the government almost doubled the area to include the Nastapoka watershed with a total of 26,910km2. It is now one of the largest national parks in North America.

TN: *Why was it a project that the Cree were interested in pursuing?*

GC: The Crees fought a great battle almost two decades ago; it saw the shelving of the Great Whale project. This area is close to the Great Whale project and this area does too have hydroelectric potential. The Crees of Whapmagoostui have used these lands for thousands of years and will continue to do so and the Grand Council wants to see this land stay in its natural state. When this area was designated for park status, the Crees were in full support.

The creation of protected areas in southern Eeyou Istchee is a big struggle; it is a constant battle with mining and forestry activity, which is what we are seeing right now with two proposals from Waswanipi and Nemaska. They are trying to protect one of the last remaining virgin forest stands and woodland caribou habitat along the Broadback River and the Grand Council is behind them 100%. So when we have an opportunity to protect our land and the rights of our people, we react and get involved.

TN: *Had it not been for this project, what would have been the fate of this land?*

GC: The area is unexploited but with mining exploration booming as its current rate and with Hydro-Québec always expanding its projects, we would see a fate for this area that would resemble that of southern Eeyou Istchee, where the ecological integrity have been lowered from commercial and industrial activity. But now that these industrial developments won't be found within these park limits, we can once again

photo by Robert Fréchette

bask into the beauty of the area and help in the conservation of certain species, such as the beluga whale and the landlocked salmon.

TN: *To your knowledge, what is the history of the Cree people on this land?*

GC: This park is located north of the 55th parallel; therefore legally speaking it's in Nunavik. However, most of the Whapmagoostui Cree traplines are located north of the 55th. The park contains one entire Cree trapline, GW-25, Sandy Petagumskum's hunting grounds, and then spills south into two other Cree traplines. In the 2008 ESIA study, maps, archeological and historical data indicated that Crees have used the inland area more than Inuit. The Inuit heavily use the Guillaume-Delisle area, but do not really expand beyond it. Coastal Crees are both land and sea, therefore it's only natural that they would move further inward and the Inuit to Clearwater Lake and beyond. But this does not give the Crees more ownership of the area. We will respect the role the Inuit will play in the management of the park, but we will ensure that our rights are respected.

TN: *What kinds of benefits will the Cree now enjoy as a result of this project?*

GC: During the many working group sessions, consultations and the writing up of the ESIA, there's no denying that Crees are as much a part of this park as the Inuit. This is echoed in the provincial administrator's Certificate of Authorization. It states that the Crees must be part of the harmonizing committee that will be set up in the near future.

The original name of this park was Lacs-Guillaume-Delisle-et-à-l'Eau-Claire, it was recently changed to Tursujuq. The Crees are requesting that a sector of the park be given a Cree name – Wiyasakami, the Cree name for Clearwater Lakes. This park will promote tourism in the region and the Crees are hoping to benefit some such a productive industry. But first and foremost, the Cree and Inuit share a common goal, which is to protect the integrity of this area and we hope that this can be achieved through mutual respect for one another.

photo by Josée Brunelle

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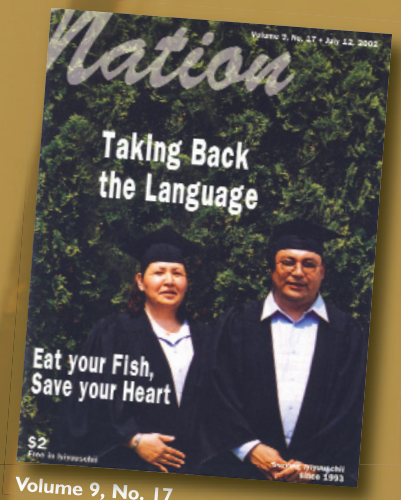
The *Nation* is turning 20! To commemorate this historic occasion, the *Nation* is embarking on a retrospective countdown to its 20th Anniversary in November 2013. In the next 16 issues, the *Nation* flashback will feature some of the *Nation*'s stories, photos and award winning coverage throughout the years, which will be compiled in a 20th collector's edition issue. Brought to you by CESO.



Volume 9, No. 17

JULY 12, 2002

NEWS

Taking Back the Language

-Will Nicholls-

On June 29 in Val d'Or 50 Crees donned gowns and lined up to receive diplomas from McGill in the Cree Literacy Course. They were part of a group of 84 Crees who graduated this year. The master of ceremonies was Arnold Cheechoo of CBC North. He talked in Cree and this set the tone. It was the first time in McGill history that a graduation ceremony would be conducted primarily in Cree. Beverly Quinn, the vice-chair of the Cree School Board would get up and congratulate the successful students. She would be followed by Elder and teacher Johnny Shecapio. Later student representives from Mistissini, Ouje-Bougoumou, Waswanipi, Nemaska, Eastmain, Waskaganish and Wemindji would get up to speak on behalf of their communities and what they experienced. You could tell that it was a proud moment for all the graduates. On hand to congratulate the grads were Waswanipi Chief Paul Gull and Mistissini Deputy Chief William MacLeod.

The graduates from Chisasibi and Whapmagoustui had a separate graduation ceremony in Chisasibi.

In the course five Cree students made the Deans list.

An interview with Luke MacLeod, Dean's Honour Roll and former Chair of the CSB.

The Nation: When did you start the Cree Literacy course?

Luke Macleod: The summer of 1999. It was run over the weekends for a total of 500 hours in the course. Each weekend would consist of 25 hours.

What made you decide to take the course?

One of the main reasons was when I was with the Cree School Board there was a push for Cree as a Language of Instruction Program. Back in 95 the Cree School Board decided to fully implement that. I remember back when I first got involved in Cree politics I was in Waskaganish or Chisasibi people talked about how the Cree School Boards would be set up. One of the Elders there said "Don't ever let it be taken out of our schools because then we will surely die." So when I got in as a commissioner I always talked about that but it was one of those areas where you talk about it but you can't do it yourself. That really affected me so my niece Daisy Moar used to always push me. She would say, "When are you going to learn Cree, the written Cree?"

Looking back at 2002

COUNTDOWN TO 20TH.... 16 ISSUES LEFT

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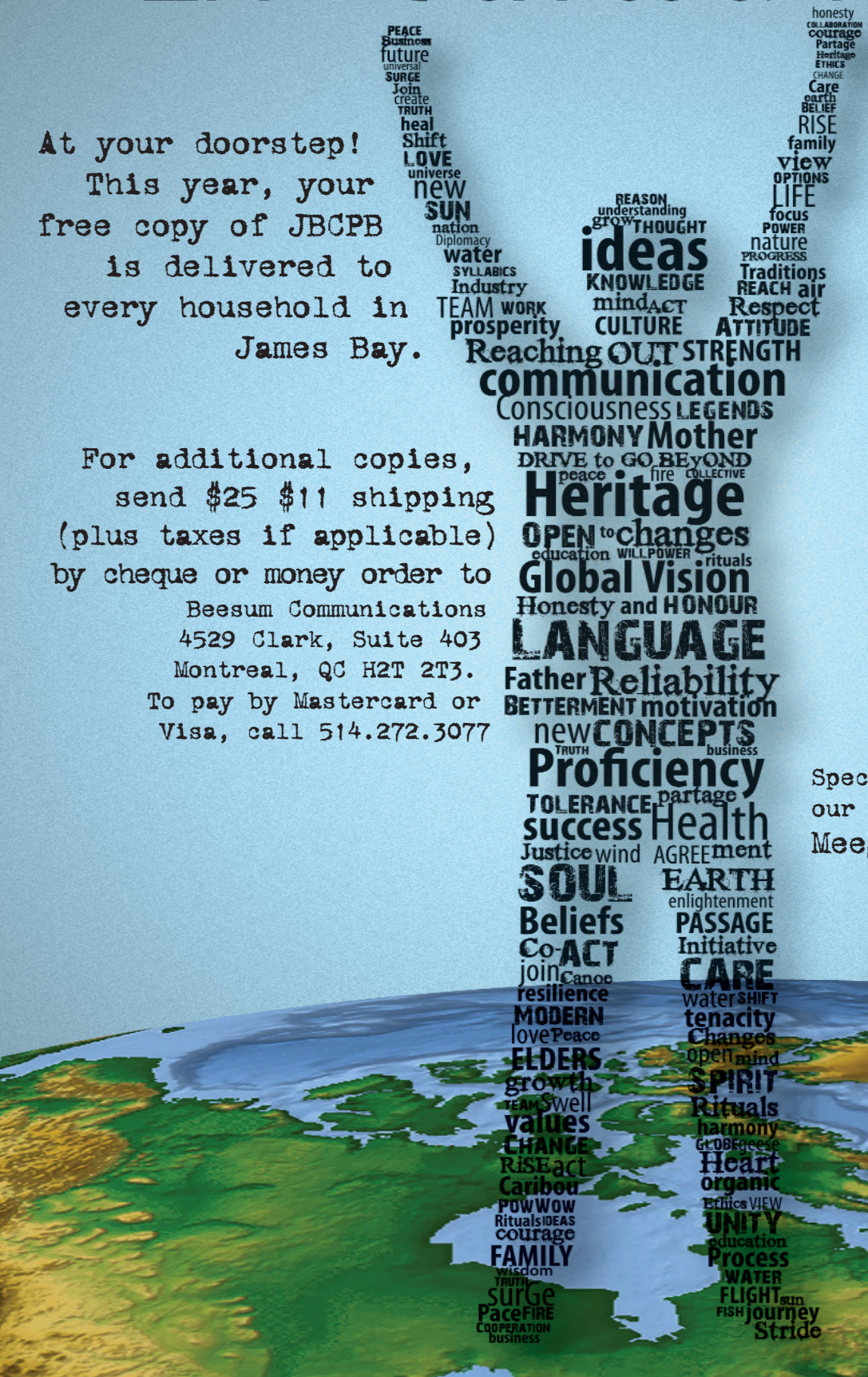

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Standing up for women

International Women's Day highlights the issues

by Akiva Levitas

Every year on March 8, people around the world celebrate women who have made a difference in our society and raise their voices for those who have been silenced. Violence towards women is like a house fire – you cannot extinguish half of it and expect the other half not to spread. For us to stop violence against women, we must tackle the issue head-on in order to snuff it out completely.

The theme for this year's celebration was "A promise is a promise: Time for action to end violence against women." This year, shocking examples of violence perpetrated against women have come to light. From the appalling gang rape in India that led to riots for better protection of women to the recent report on the mistreatment and violence directed towards Aboriginal women by the RCMP in British Columbia.

Since 1909, March 8 has been celebrated as a day to promote equal rights for women around the world. In the past 100 years, much has changed in our lives but the one thing that remains the same is that many women still face the consequences of a deeply entrenched patriarchy.

With the distinction between the treatment of Native and non-Native women in Canada, there is a growing sense of need for more dialogue to raise awareness of this divide. Quebec Native Women (QNW) organized a day of action on March 8, which included a beading workshop and an art exhibit in support of the missing and murdered Aboriginal womens movement.

Leading the workshop was Melissa Mollen Dupuis, Aboriginal activist and co-founder of Idle No More's Quebec branch. "It's a traditional way of crafting that brings women together to talk," Dupuis said. "But today we're also exchanging information about Aboriginal women across Canada."

A variety of topics were discussed during the workshop, including developments in movements like Idle No More

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and Missing Justice, and the Conservative government's stance on Aboriginal issues.

UN reports reveal that 70% of people living in poverty around the world are women. "If you are born First Nations and are a woman, you have a 15% [higher] chance to be a victim of a criminal act or sexual violence," stated Dupuis.

These stats hit much closer to home in a Statistics Canada report which revealed that homicide rates of Aboriginal women are almost seven times higher than those of non-Aboriginal females. According to research by the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), the number of cases of unsolved murders among Aboriginal females is disproportionately larger than for all other murders in Canada.

But the recent numbers only confirm a disturbing and long-term trend. Poverty and abuse are at high levels amongst Canada's Aboriginals and as the fastest-growing segment of the population, the issues have to be addressed in order to reduce the rates of violence.

Across Canada, numerous initiatives are being started as a result of this year's International Women's Day, such as a call by the Canadian Association of Statutory Human Rights Agencies along with provincial First Nations rights groups for a federal action plan addressing violence against Aboriginal women and girls.

The motion calls upon the Harper government to work with Aboriginal people to address the root causes of violence towards female Aboriginals and to establish an independent inquiry into those who went missing or were murdered and finally put their cases to rest.

"Today is really about talking about issues between Native and non-Native people," Dupuis said. "So we're having exchanges while we're beading together." This interaction creates a way to make connections and present the issues to a wider and more receptive audience. This addresses one of the biggest problems in that there is very little interaction between Natives and non-Natives in Canada. "Rowing in the same canoe for 400 years without telling each other where you're going, you'll be turning circles," said Dupuis.

> "TODAY IS REALLY ABOUT TALKING ABOUT ISSUES BETWEEN NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE PEOPLE. SO WE'RE HAVING EXCHANGES WHILE WE'RE BEADING TOGETHER."

After the beading workshop, the work of thousands of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women was displayed in support of the work done by missing and murdered Aboriginal women. Over 5000 paper moccasins as well as cards were sent to QNW as a part of the Write for Rights campaign 2012, which was organized by Amnesty International.

Hundreds attended marches that took place later on in the day at Montreal's Place Émilie Gamelin. Many came out to show their support against the injustice facing women of all stripes and from all over the world.

At Concordia University, Cinema Politica screened *Status Quo? The Unfinished Business of Feminism in Canada*. The film examines key areas in the quest for women's rights – specifically universal childcare, violence against women and access to abortion.

In honour of the day, YMCAs across Quebec held an open house encouraging women and girls to try out programs, workshops and the rest of their facilities free of charge.

Outside the cities though, Aboriginal women face increased challenges because of the distance required to travel in order to get better services. "If you're differently positioned across the province, it changes your situation," said Dupuis. "If you're next to a road, you can have better access to cities. If you're next to a city, you have better access to services and jobs."

For First Nations, Inuit and Métis women who face greater risk of violence, better access is especially important as violence towards women often goes unreported if it is occurring in a remote region. "The situation for First Nations women across Canada is not really shiny. It's not all around bad, but there's an emergency," Dupuis said. "Just thinking about the Highway of Tears in BC, it's a situation that should not exist in a country like Canada."

The fight for justice and equality amongst Canada's most repressed minority has been a long one but there is still much to be done. One day of the year is not enough to bring proper attention to these issues. The day has passed but the struggle still remains for many women facing violence and discrimination around the world and especially in First Nations communities.

To view the extended interview with Dupuis, check out the video on the Nation's website at nationnews.ca

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HEALTH MATTERS

By Amy German

Increasing awareness

Will revamping the sex-ed program change the alarming stats?

by Amy German

It was just a few months ago that several health professionals from the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay were talking about how sex education needed to be expanded to an even younger clientele in the communities as a means of combating Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

These professionals had noticed that there were an increasing number of pregnant teenagers continuing to drink simply because they didn't know that they were pregnant.

Many of these health workers suggested that the youth in the Cree communities should be educated about sex at a younger age. They were discovering that the youth were engaging with drugs, alcohol and sexual activity at a much younger age.

Public Health's Françoise Caron is in charge of Chii kayeh iyaakwaamiih program, the Cree Nation's healthy sexuality and relationship program that has been tailor-made for the Crees through the school board, health board and community consultations. First introduced to Secondary 3 students in 2007-2008, the program is not always offered in every community, which means some students are not receiving any sex education whatsoever, Caron warned.

"Our problem is that because the program is changing, schools are finding it more difficult to find the space for the entire program and so it is spread over the whole year. Every year we see at least one or two schools not offering the program," said Caron.

Since the Cree School Board is revamping a number of the courses offered into the provincially mandated Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum (GVC), it has been suggested that instead of offering the Chii kayeh program as a one-year course in Sec 3, it be broken up in three parts and given in Sec 1, 2 and 3.

According to Caron, the Cree School Board is looking at where the course could be offered and by which departments for the first two years. Only in the third year would Sec 3 students be exposed to issues such as contraception and have to work on a special project.

"The topics covered in the Chii kayeh program could be done in Cree or possibly covered in a French or English course or science class. We are talking about 12 lessons per year," said Caron.

While the content would be revamped so that it could be delivered on a more general level, the idea is to give enough information to help arm the youth in trying to turn around some alarming statistics concerning teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

According to Caron, teen pregnancy rates are triple the Quebec average and STI rates continue to climb and are at an all-time high of six times the provincial average. At that, the STIs are infecting youth as young as 14.

Unlike the rest of Quebec there is a high re-infection rate for certain STIs, where an individual will receive treatment but then returns to the clinic with the same STI.

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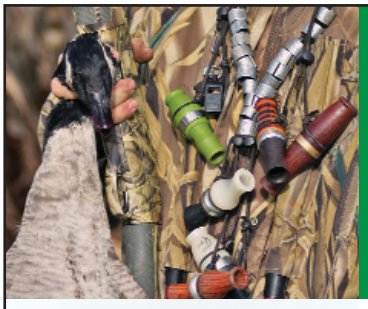

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"Primarily we are talking about chlamydia, though there is more gonorrhea now than before. The problem with chlamydia is that if it goes untreated there are serious health consequences. You can get a chronic condition and face infertility. Your fallopian tubes can also become blocked because of the scarring. So we want to test and treat people and prevent this from happening," said Caron.

The Chii kayeh program was created with these issues in mind and to help youth look at these issues from a number of different perspectives.

While on one hand the program is geared to helping students gain more self-esteem, it also wants them to think about themselves in the future. Research has shown that the greater the vision of the future a youth possesses, the less likely they are to get pregnant. This program actually gets the youth to focus on those particular goals as a means of prevention.

At the same time, Caron said the program takes reality into perspective. So, while there is a focus on why it is advantageous to put off engaging in sexual activity and the essentials of using birth control, it also addresses why teens experience difficulty in these areas.

Students are given a strong dose of reality as part of the lessons on teen pregnancy.

"In one of our activities they can see how their lives would change as they compare what they regularly do during the day with what it would be like as a young couple with a baby.

"They get to see how they don't even have time to take a shower. They look at the costs of becoming a new parent and making a budget for that by looking up all of the items they would need for the first year of a baby's life," said Caron.

There are also lessons on other specific issues such as FASD, but Caron said the information is kept very general so they do not to stigmatize anyone who may have it.

In terms of bringing this program to a younger audience, the information concerning condoms and birth control would be more generalized but it would offer the opportunity for anyone who wishes to learn more about a specific aspect of birth control to contact the local clinic or school nurse.

When students finally take the third year of the program, it would then become more detailed.

"What is known is that for prevention programs of this type to be effective, you want to reach the youth before they become sexually active," said Caron.

Ideally, Public Health is hoping to foster an environment that seeks to support a strong sex-ed program put together with easy access to condoms, confidential access to birth control as well as strong parental support.

At press time, the Health Board was still waiting on word from the School Board as to whether or not the program would see a three-year revamping or remain as a one-year program for Sec 3s only.

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A presentation of The Board of Compensation and the Cree Regional Economic Enterprises Company

A TALK WITH
Matthew Happyjack,
President of Air Creebec

airCreebec

A Cree man from Waswanipi, he holds a certificate in accounting and a Masters of Business Administration from UQAT. He managed a Caisse Populaire, was an education administrator and has held several senior management positions. He served on Air Creebec's board of directors for 75% of its existence. Following the passing of Albert Diamond in 2009, he was hired as president of Air Creebec.

We want to share the history of Air Creebec, can you please guide us Matthew?

Watchiya. The beginning dates back to 1979. Following the ratification of the JBNQA, the CRA was faced with a unique opportunity to extend its activities to the field of air transportation. Late Grand Chief Billy Diamond and Austin Airways led the creation of an airline belonging 51% to the Cree. In 1988 Air Creebec became 100% Cree-owned, and was the largest commercial transaction ever completed by Canada's Aboriginal Peoples at that time.

"Air Creebec has been recognized as one of the most successful regional airlines in Canada."

What is the mission and the goals of Air Creebec?

Air Creebec's team members are honored and proud to be part of the firm. There is a high level of trust and mutual respect amongst team members, Creeco and clients. Creeco always places the welfare of the firm and that of its clients above their own self-interests. The firm is highly innovative in its delivery of excellent customer service and will always be guided by its principal purpose of contributing to the development and self-sufficiency of the Cree Nation while maintaining long-term profitability.

The following are goals determined by the board to be our priorities: profitability, longevity, stability, services to the Cree communities, self-sufficiency, leadership, transparency, Cree employment, and Cree involvement in Management and Development.

Air Creebec is carving out an enviable name for itself in the field of charter flights, where it is respected for its ability to quickly and efficiently react, not only for routine services but also for emergencies, such as forest fires and floods. Our airline offers a VIP charter program for businesses, and we have planes dedicated to long term contracts.

Where is the head office and where does Air Creebec fly to?

The head office is located in Val-d'Or with a staff of 55. We have a new office and hangar in Montreal with a staff of 72. We also have an office in Timmins, Ontario. We employ over 302 staff and more than 50% are Cree, this makes us one of the largest employers of First Nations in the region. We are proud of that fact!

We fly to all the Cree communities in Eeyou Istchee as well as into Val-d'Or and Montreal. We also fly into Timmins, Ontario and into the Ontario Cree communities of Attawapiskat, Fort Albany, Kashechewan, Moosonee and Peawanuck.

How would you describe the company today?

Air Creebec started with one plane, a Twin Otter. From those humble beginnings it has evolved today to becoming the flagship company of Creeco. Today we have 18 planes. We have our own magazine called Destinations and a website: www.aircreebec.ca.

We are fortunate that the late Albert Diamond left a great legacy in Air Creebec by hiring the best people in the business. We know that we are only as good as our team.

What are the plans for the future?

One of our key growth areas is partnering with other First Nations across Canada who may have very little to no capacity and have major projects coming up in their territories. With our years of experience and expertise and our large network, we can help them achieve success and take full advantage of the opportunities these projects offer on their terms. We also are already reaping the benefits of the mining that is going on within Eeyou Istchee. We thank our customers for their loyalty and invite you to fly with us. Meegwetch.

Strongly opposed

A poll on uranium mining in Quebec confirms support for the Cree Nation's position

by Jesse Staniforth

A new poll from Leger Marketing commissioned by the Canadian Boreal Initiative shows widespread opposition to uranium mining – and by association, to the Matoush uranium project – across both Cree and non-Cree communities. Though Cree opposition remains much stronger, in many of the poll questions non-Crees opposed to the project are also now beginning to represent a majority.

The questions relate specifically to the issue of uranium mining, for which Strateco Resources Inc. has not yet been granted a license at the Matoush site. However, many of those opposed to the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission's (CNSC) decision to grant a license to Strateco for advanced uranium exploration see uranium mining as an inevitable result of allowing this exploration to take place.

The study found that 74% of combined respondents (81% of Crees, 68% of non-Crees) believe they have not been well-enough informed about the "impacts to the environment and human health related to exploitation of a uranium mine." A total of 80% (74% Cree, 86% non-Cree) believe that "municipalities should have a voice in decisions regarding whether any government project should proceed or not." Importantly, 76% of those polled believe projects should be cancelled "if a majority of the citizens of a community believe that a particular project poses a potential health hazard."

> "THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL ACCEPTABILITY OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN EEYOU ISTCHEE IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE NATION-TO-NATION RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CREE NATION AND QUEBEC."

The study was undertaken between February 12 and 19 of 300 adults living in northern Quebec; 150 were Cree and 150 were non-Cree.

When asked about supporting a uranium mine in their region specifically, respondents were split: 73% of Crees either "somewhat opposed" (14%) or "totally opposed" (60%) to such a project in their area, while 55% of non-Crees were either "somewhat in favour" (38%) or "totally in favour" (17%). Together, the Cree and non-Cree respondents still added up to a slim majority of 53% in opposition to local uranium mines. A similar number (55%) opposed "the exploitation of a uranium mine in northern Quebec."

The real change in the poll began when respondents were asked about the exploitation of a uranium mine "upstream on a river flowing through their community": now 84% of Crees opposed the idea, joined by 67% of non-Crees, for a total of 76%. (The Matoush project is located near the watersheds of the Temiscamie River, which drains into Lake Mistassini and likewise feeds into the region surrounding the community of Chibougamau.)

It is the responses to the survey's final two questions, however, in which

the opinions of Cree and non-Cree populations surveyed are clearest in their agreement.

A strong majority of 86% (90% of Crees, 83% of non-Crees) agree that the Quebec government should undertake "an independent review of the economic, environmental and social impacts of uranium mining before Quebec moves forward with authorizing any uranium projects."

Perhaps even more importantly to opponents of the Matoush project, however, is the survey's final question. It asks whether Strateco should "override the concerns of the Cree community and go ahead with the mining project" (a question referring to the company's court challenge to force the Quebec government to override the Cree veto) or if Strateco should "respect the Cree community and not proceed with the project."

A full 77% of poll respondents (90% of Crees, 63% of non-Crees) agree that Strateco should "respect the Cree community" and halt its efforts toward uranium mining in the Eeyou Istchee.

In response to the poll results, the Grand Council of the Crees/Cree Regional Authority (GCC/CRA) was quick to call on the Quebec government to heed the wishes of the respondents by "[moving] forward with its plan to convene an independent evaluation of the uranium industry in Quebec," saying that "a very strong majority of Quebecers are in favour of such an evaluation being held."

In a press release from the GCC/CRA, Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come stated, "The Grand Council of the Crees has previously urged the government to convene a broad, independent and rigorous study of the environmental impacts of uranium mining in Quebec. These poll results confirm that this approach also enjoys overwhelming public support."

As always, the Grand Council reiterated its support for environmentally secure resource development in the Eeyou Istchee. "The Cree Nation is committed to working with our neighbours to pursue the many opportunities of environmental and socially sustainable development that exist in our territory," said Coon Come.

However, he underlined, the GCC/CRA position that uranium mining is not an acceptable form of resource development within the territory of the Cree Nation.

"The importance of social acceptability of proposed development projects in Eeyou Istchee is an essential part of the nation-to-nation relationship between the Cree Nation and Quebec. As these poll results show, this principle is also recognized and supported by the population of the Eeyou Istchee James Bay Territory."

In an unexpected move, the Quebec government has decided to publicly consult if uranium development should be allowed in the province, according to the Montreal *Gazette*. It could happen faster than you think, as early April is the latest Quebec Environment Minister Yves-François Blanchet would travel to Chibougamau to see what's up. This trip could lead to an announcement of a moratorium halting prospecting and exploration projects now underway.

About 70 sites in northern Quebec involve uranium exploration and prospecting activities, but the Matoush project, being developed by Strateco Resources Inc. is the most advanced location.

Currently, Strateco is suing Blanchet, in his role as Quebec's environment minister, calling on him to make a decision. The Grand Council of Crees (Eeyou Istchee) called for a moratorium on uranium development last August and is part of the court case. Quebec approval is the last stepping stone for Strateco to move ahead with the project.

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by Lyle Stewart

When justice is injustice

Howard Sapers is ringing the alarm. If the rate of incarceration of a specific community's people is an indication of the health of that community, First Nations in Canada are in an emergency.

Sapers is the Correctional Investigator of Canada. His job is to provide an independent oversight over how the most fundamental power of the state in a free society – that power being to take away an individual's freedom – is wielded. It's a fundamental role in a democratic system. And, according to the report he issued on Aboriginal incarceration rates March 7, that power has never been more disproportionately imposed on Native people in Canada than the present.

In the last five years alone, Sapers underlined, the population of First Nations, Inuit and Métis inmates in federal penitentiaries has skyrocketed by 43%.

Look at it this way: the rate of non-Aboriginals in Canada currently serving federal sentences (two years or more) represents 109 out of 100,000. Aboriginals, however, now face federal incarceration rates of 910 out of 100,000. One in every five federal inmates is Native, vastly out of proportion to the 3% of the Canadian population composed of First Nations people. Among women, almost a third of inmates are Aboriginal.

Sapers points to a number of reasons for this: underfunding of Aboriginal offender programs is a major cause, (particularly of community healing lodges); a lack of community involvement; and a failure by the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) to fully implement legally required measures to address the unique position of Aboriginal offenders given their cultural history and social reality.

In fact, as Sapers wrote in *Spirit Matters: Aboriginal People and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act*, 20 years after enactment of the law, "CSC has failed to make the kind of systemic, policy and resource changes that are required in law to address factors within its control that would help mitigate the chronic over-representation of Aboriginal people in federal penitentiaries."

The Correctional Investigator did acknowledge that CSC does not control who is sentenced to a federal term, much less for how long nor when they might win parole. However, his

report only superficially addressed the societal conditions that might help lead to bad individual choices or the racial factors that in turn lead authorities to punish those choices more harshly.

As the Cree Grand Council Justice Coordinator Donald Nicholls observed, internal factors do not explain all of the Aboriginal population growth in prison. "We have to look at the root causes," Nicholls insisted. "And if there are systemic issues, we have to see if these are being addressed."

Under the Conservative government of Stephen Harper, I would argue that, far from addressing these issues, they are taking a radical turn for the worse.

Says Nicholls: "Residential schools, assimilationist policies and economic factors had an impact. Poverty leads to crime. Neglect: children engage in activities when there is absent parenting. We know some of the past policies have impacted parenting. This increases the chances of making bad choices. There are issues with higher drop-out rates and lower education, which lowers economic opportunities."

And yet, it takes two to tango. And in this, at least, the Cree of Eeyou Istchee have moved far beyond many other First Nations in Canada in a short amount of time. The establishment of the Cree Justice Department in 2008 has quickly

evolved into an interventionist model that seeks to enhance rehabilitation and reinsertion of Cree offenders in the community while safeguarding public safety.

It's a hands-on approach, Nicholls explained, adding that the Sapers report emphasized the need for community engagement in helping prevent criminal behaviour and reducing the chance of recidivism after an offender has served their sentence.

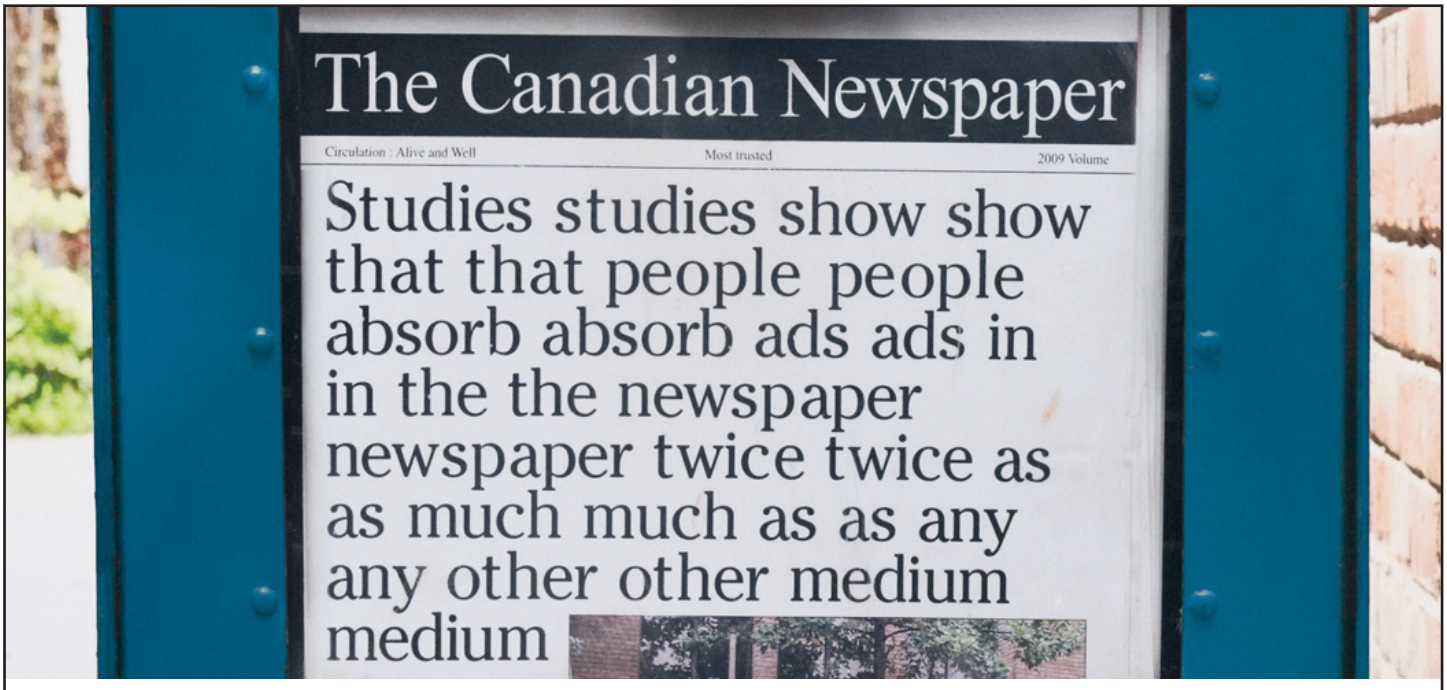
"We are investing in our own people," he said, referring to the introduction of community justice officers in each Cree community, the ongoing training they receive and the programs they administer. "These are solutions that help make an impact. To make a real difference we need to partner with other organizations: the health board, school board and youth groups."

Nicholls' goal is to intervene to a greater degree in case management of individual Cree offenders serving time in Quebec penitentiaries, something Sapers identified as a key part of the solution. In other words, help offenders access programs and to engage in the healing that will ultimately help them reintegrate their communities. Especially in Quebec, where language issues often become an impediment to mutual understanding and disadvantage Cree offenders when it comes to security level assessment and eligibility for conditional release, this effort can make a huge difference in shortening time spent in custody and ensuring the "clients" don't get caught in a revolving door of repeat criminality.

Key to that effort, as the Sapers report observed, is the involvement of community Elders. "Elders would say that the land is the healer," commented Nicholls. "If we can't take [Cree inmates] to the land, we can bring the land back to them, for instance, by bringing them traditional foods. When they see traditional foods, they get excited, and remember positive things of their culture and the land. It reconnects them to positive memories. We are working with Quebec institutions to implement this activity."

Another innovative exercise that Nicholls points to as a major piece of the puzzle is the "jobs not jails" program. "We work with the business community to help ex-offenders become part of the community again. When they are nearing release, our officers start looking for things in community for them to do."

In the scale of things, these efforts are just beginning to have an impact. But Aboriginal involvement and control over their own justice systems is an essential part of self-sufficiency and political autonomy. The Cree of Eeyou Istchee are proving the truth of this through innovative and energetic efforts to repatriate the most fundamental power of a self-governing people. And it's a model for First Nations communities in the context of the judicial catastrophe that is devastating Aboriginals across this country.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UNDER THE NORTHERN SKY

In the spirit of respect and fairness

by Xavier Kataquapit

There are many success stories across Canada when it comes to resource-development agreements and partnerships between First Nations, companies and government. Most non-Native people don't realize this. Even in my home community of Attawapiskat, negotiations in general between my people and De Beers Canada has benefited many. The process is obviously not perfect but at the very least, the company, First Nation leadership and governments have bargained in good faith to make a very large project happen in the middle of pristine wilderness.

This is a big change for my people considering that we were largely forgotten. Through a process of assimilation and marginalization, my grandfathers and great-grandfathers had little choice but to live off a limited amount of land and survive through hunting and gathering. Even though resource-development companies and non-Native people were reaping the benefits of huge projects happening on traditional territories, we saw very little coming to us.

These days, people think that First Nations in southern areas, such as Timmins, Kirkland Lake, North Bay and Sudbury, were the recipients in one way or another of the many huge mining, forestry and hydro projects that occurred over the past 100 years. If you check with First Nation leaders and Elders in these areas, you will quickly find out that Native people were very much left out of the loop when it came to all this development. Only a few decades ago, in general, First Nation people were not very welcome in many Canadian cities and towns. Of course, we have to remember that this was another time in the evolution of our society when racism and bigotry was more or less normal.

Thanks to the survival skills and sheer will of First Nation people we have managed to live long enough where our newer generations have access to education and today we see many bright young Native lawyers, executives, educators and politicians who are making life better for their people.

Wabun Tribal Council Executive Director Shawn Batise greets the new Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne at the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada.

In the past few decades, many First Nation organizations and tribal councils have developed the negotiating expertise that has allowed Native people to reap some of the benefits of huge resource development projects on traditional lands. In my own area known as the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation (NAN), which comprises most of northern Ontario, the Wabun Tribal Council's six chiefs have negotiated all types of resource-development agreements. These have led to training, employment and business opportunities for their First Nation members.

None of this came about easily. I can recall that when Shawn Batise, Executive Director for Wabun Tribal Council, and his chiefs began communicating with large corporations coming on to their traditional lands, there was some confusion, resistance and confrontation. However, once Batise and his leadership communicated with resource developers in a positive and beneficial way, the result was a meeting of minds.

The companies involved in the development were assisted by Wabun Tribal Council in terms of better access and improved time lines for these large projects. I have seen many Exploration Agreements (EA), Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Impact and Benefits Agreements (IBA) signings involving corporations, government and Wabun First Nations. These have been mutually beneficial situations for everyone. As time has progressed, resource developers are now familiar with the process that Wabun Tribal Council has developed and that has resulted in positive working partnerships.

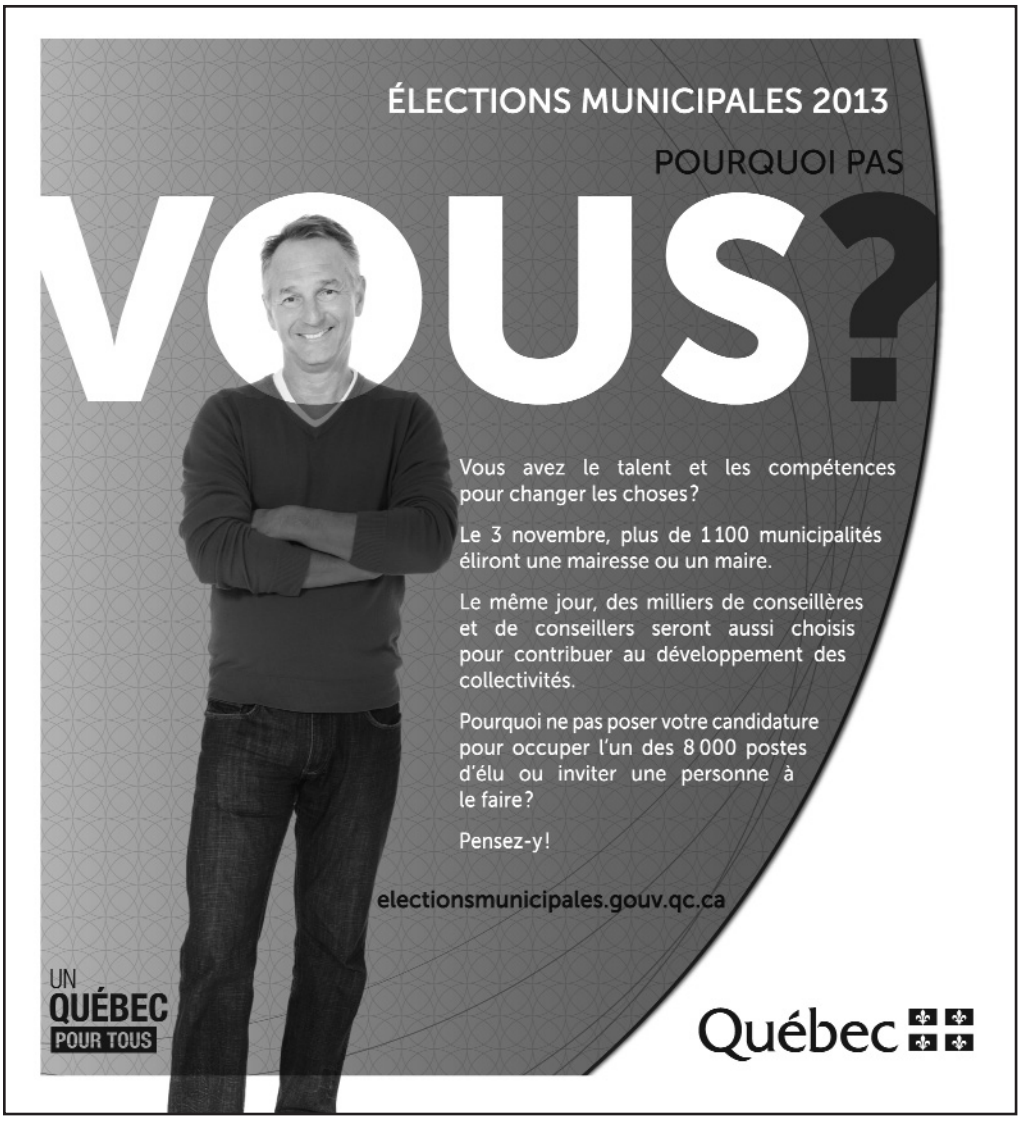
I know how proud the Elders are in the Wabun First Nations of Beaverhouse, Brunswick House, Chapleau Ojibwe, Flying Post, Matachewan and Mattagami. They are happy to see their grandchildren given work opportunities through training programs and education initiatives that have resulted from mutually beneficial agreements.

Although this is a new process for First Nation people who have been ignored for so many years, a new day has dawned for many Wabun members. They have become professionals working in forestry, mining and hydro development. Young men like Chris McKay of Mattagami First Nation has made us all proud with the good work he has been doing in consulting and new business development for his community.

In the far north, in communities like Attawapiskat, Fort Albany and Kashechewan, my people are still in the early stages of coming to terms with so much rapid development happening in the last pristine northern areas of Ontario. I am happy that they can look to organizations like NAN, Mushkegowuk Council, Chiefs of Ontario, the Assembly of First Nations and many tribal councils, for assistance and support in how to successfully move ahead with resource development.

Thanks to a lot of hard work by people like Batise and his Wabun leadership, people are realizing that First Nations are ready and willing to work with government and resource developers in the spirit of respect and fairness.

"ALTHOUGH THIS IS A NEW PROCESS FOR FIRST NATION PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN IGNORED FOR SO MANY YEARS, A NEW DAY HAS DAWNED FOR MANY WABUN MEMBERS."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The Native Women's Shelter of Montreal: 1-866-403-4688
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The Centre for Native Education has changed its name to the Aboriginal Student Resource Centre (ASRC). The new name is inclusive of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis students the centre serves and recognizes its role as a resource for the Concordia community. For any further details contact: aboriginalcentre@concordia.ca or 514-848-2424 ext. 7327.

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